

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N° LXXXIV.]

Saturday, Sept. 9. 1786.

Conclusion of the Story of Father *Nicholas*.

I Was a coward, however, in the wrong as well as in the right, and fell upon an expedient to screen myself from a discovery that might have saved me. I contrived to deceive my wife, and to conceal my visits to Madam de Trenville's, under pretext of some perplexing incidents that had arisen in the management of those affairs with which I was intrusted. Her mind was too pure for suspicion or for jealousy. It was easy even for a novice in falsehood, like me, to deceive her. But I had an able assistant in Delaferré, who now resumed the ascendancy over me he had formerly possessed, but with an attraction more powerful, from the infatuated attachment which my vanity and weakness, as much as her art and beauty, had made me conceive for Madam de Trenville.

It happened, that just at this time a young man arrived from our province, and brought letters for Emilia from a female friend of hers in the neighbourhood of Santonges. He had been bred a miniature-painter, and came to town for improvement in his art. Emilia, who doated on her little boy, proposed to him to draw his picture in the innocent attitude of his sleep. The young painter was pleased with the idea, provided she would allow him to paint the child in her arms. This was to be concealed from me, for the sake of surprising me with the picture when it should be finished. That she might have a better opportunity of effecting this little concealment, Emilia would often hear, with a sort of satisfaction, my engagements abroad, and encourage me to keep them, that the picture might advance in my absence.

She knew not what, during that absence, was my employment. The slave of vice and of profusion, I was violating my faith to her, in the arms of the most artful and worthless of women, and losing the fortune that should have supported my child and hers, to a set of cheats and villains. Such was the snare that Delaferré and his associates had drawn around me. It was covered with the appearance of love and generosity. De Trenville had art enough to make me believe, that she was every way the victim of her affection for me. My first great losses at play she pretended to reimburse from her own private fortune, and then threw herself upon my honour, for relief from those distresses into which I had brought her. After having exhausted all the money I possessed, and all my credit could command, I would have stopped short of ruin; but when I thought of returning in disgrace and poverty to the place I had left respected and happy, I had not resolution enough to retreat. I took refuge in desperation, mortgaged the remains of my estate, and staked the produce to recover what I had lost, or to lose myself. The event was such as might have been expected.

After the dizzy horror of my situation had left me power to think, I hurried to Madam de Trenville's. She gave me such a reception as suited one who was no longer worth the deceiving. Conviction of her falsehood, and of that ruin to which she had been employed to lead me, flashed upon my mind. I left her with execrations, which she received with the coolness of hardened vice, of experienced seduction. I rushed from her house, I knew not whither. My steps involuntarily led me home. At my own door I stopped, as if it had been death to enter. When I had shrunk back some paces, I turned again; twice did I attempt to knock, and could not; my heart throbbed with unspeakable horror, and my knees smote each other. It was night, and the street was dark and silent around me. I threw myself down before the door, and wished some ruffian's hand to ease me of life and thought together. At last the recollection of Emilia, and of my infant boy, crossed my disordered mind, and a gush of tenderness burst from my eyes. I rose, and knocked at the door. When I was let in, I went up softly to my wife's chamber. She was asleep, with a night-lamp burning by her, her child sleeping on her bosom, and its little hand grasping her neck. Think what I felt as I looked! She smiled through her sleep, and seemed to dream

dream of happiness. My brain began to madden again; and as the misery to which she must wake crossed my imagination, the horrible idea rose within me,—I shudder yet to tell it!—to murder them as they lay, and next myself!—I stretched my hand towards my wife's throat!—The infant unclasped its little fingers, and laid hold of one of mine. The gentle pressure wrung my heart; its softness returned; I burst into tears; but I could not stay to tell her of our ruin. I rushed out of the room, and, gaining an obscure hotel in a distant part of the town, wrote a few distracted lines, acquainting her of my folly and of my crimes; that I meant immediately to leave France, and not to return till my penitence should wipe out my offences, and my industry repair that ruin in which I had involved her. I recommended her and my child to my mother's care, and to the protection of that Heaven which she had never offended. Having sent this, I left Paris on the instant, and had walked several miles from town before it was light. At sun-rise a stage-coach overtook me. 'Twas going on the road to *Brest*; I entered it without arranging any future plan, and sat in sullen and gloomy silence, in the corner of the carriage. That day and next night I went on mechanically, with several other passengers, regardless of food, and incapable of rest. But the second day I found my strength fail, and when we stopped in the evening, I fell down in a faint, in the passage of the inn. I was put to bed, it seems, and lay for more than a week in the stupefaction of a low fever. A charitable brother of that order to which I now belong, who happened to be in the inn, attended me with the greatest care and humanity, and when I began to recover, the good old man ministered to my soul, as he had done to my body, that assistance and consolation he easily discovered it to *need*. ~~want~~. By his tender assiduities I was now so far recruited, as to be able to breathe the fresh air at the window of a little parlour. As I sat there one morning, the same stage-coach in which I had arrived, stopped at the door of the inn, when I saw alight out of it the young painter who had been recommended to us at Paris. The sight overpowered my weakness, and I fell lifeless from my seat. The incident brought several people into the room, and amongst others the young man himself. When they had restored me to sense, I had recollection enough to desire him to remain with me alone. It was some time before he recognized me; when he did, with horror in his aspect, after much hesitation, and the most solemn intreaty from me, he told me the dreadful
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sequel of my misfortunes. My wife and child were no more. The shock which my letter gave, the state of weakness she was then in had not strength to support. The effects were a fever, delirium, and death. Her infant perished with her. In the interval of reason preceding her death, she called him to her bed-side, gave him the picture he had drawn; and with her last breath charged him, if ever he could find me out, to deliver that and her forgiveness to me. He put it into my hand. I know not how I survived. Perhaps it was owing to the outworn state in which my disease had left me. My heart was too weak to burst; and there was a sort of palsy on my mind that seemed insensible to its calamities. By that holy man who had once before saved me from death, I was placed here, where, except one melancholy journey to that spot where they had laid my Emilia and her boy, I have ever since remained. My story is unknown, and they wonder at the severity of that life by which I endeavour to atone for my offences.—But it is not by suffering alone that Heaven is reconciled; I endeavour, by works of charity and beneficence, to make my being not hateful in its sight. Blessed be God! I have attained the consolation I wished.—Already, on my wasting days a beam of mercy sheds its celestial light. The visions of this flinty couch are changed to mildness. 'Twas but last night my Emilia beckoned ~~me~~ me in smiles; this little cherub was with her!"—His voice ceased; he looked on the picture, then towards Heaven; and a faint glow crossed the paleness of his cheek. I stood awe-struck at the sight. The bell for Vespers tolled—he took my hand—I kissed his, and my tears began to drop on it.—“My son,” said he, “to feelings like yours it may not be unpleasing to recall my story:—If the world allure thee, if vice ensnare with its pleasures, or abash with its ridicule, think of Father Nicholas—be virtuous, and be happy.”

E D I N B U R G H :

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